

Subject:MAF Expansion Update

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From:John Pruette

To:More at Four Fiscal Contacts, More at Four Program, More at Four Administrator

As we begin the 2007-08 school year, I am pleased to announce that the expansion of the More at Four Pre-kindergarten program (MAF) is well under way. With nearly 5,000 expansion slots requested and awarded for placement in 71 counties across the state, you are to be commended for the tremendous effort expended thus far to ensure high quality pre-kindergarten services for a greater number of North Carolina's "at-risk" children.

As you may be aware, there are two significant changes to the special provision language that governs the implementation of MAF. One regarding eligibility and the other related to a county's ability to provide a "required local contribution." Each will be important as we work to realize the total expansion funded for SFY 2007-2008. The changes are as follows and highlighted in red:

- **SECTION 7.24.(d)** For the 2007-2008 and the 2008-2009 fiscal years, the "More at Four" program shall establish income eligibility requirements for the program not to exceed seventy-five percent (75%) of the State median income. Up to twenty percent (20%) of children enrolled may have family incomes in excess of seventy-five percent (75%) of median income if they have other designated risk factors. **Furthermore, any age-eligible child of (i) an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States, including the North Carolina National Guard, State military forces, or a reserve component of the armed forces, who is ordered to active duty by the proper authority within the last 18 months or expected to be ordered within the next 18 months, or (ii) a member of the armed forces of the United States, including the North Carolina National Guard, State military forces, or a reserve component of the armed forces, who was injured or killed while serving on active duty, shall be eligible for the program.**

This language allows local programs to address a critical need that exists not just in our military counties, but every county in North Carolina. Currently, 8.6 percent (n = 101,563) of total U.S. active duty personnel reside in NC. Nearly 40% of those personnel have children younger than six years of age. That coupled with the large number of NC National Guard members and reservists currently deployed in this time of war, a new category of "at-risk" children has been created. It should be our charge to utilize the current expansion opportunities to meet the needs of this vulnerable population.

- **SECTION 7.24.(f)** If a county is unable to increase "More at Four" slots because of a documented lack of available resources necessary to provide the required local contribution for the additional slots allocated to the county for the 2007-2008 fiscal year, the contract agency for that county may appeal to the Office of School Readiness for an exception to the required local amount for those additional slots. The Office of School Readiness may grant an exception and allot funds to pay up to ninety percent (90%) of the full cost of the additional slots for that county if it finds that (i) there is in fact a documented lack of available resources in the county and (ii) granting the exception will not reduce access statewide to "More at Four" slots.

The parameters for this appeal process are currently being defined and must be approved by the State Board of Education before implementation can occur. The Board is on schedule to approve this process at it's meeting to be held October 3-4. Factors to be included in the process, most likely, will be:

- relative wealth of counties
- identification of potential "other resources" available for contribution
- resources currently expended on MAF
- capacity of county to expand into high-quality settings
- relative numbers of children to be served

I will keep you informed as further details emerge. As always, the state office is available to help in any way possible as you implement MAF at the local level and work to realize expansion opportunities in this year.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of the children of this state!

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